



" This is not the place to speak of him as he is to those who love him, nor to intrude into the sanctities of a singularly noble and happy family life. A man of high spirituality, of spotless character, ever seeking to serve, to uplift, to bless, Upendranath Basu will long remain in the hearts of his friends and compatriots as an exceptionally high example of pure and lofty manhood."—
DR. ANNIE BESANT, in THE THEOSOPHIST 1910.

Foreword.

ॐ तत् सत् ब्रह्मणे नमः ॥
गीता सुगीता कर्तव्या किमन्यैः शास्त्रं विस्तरेः ।
या स्वयम् पद्मनाभस्य मुखपद्मं विनिसृता ॥

Sing well the Lord's song
That from the lotus lips of Him
Of lotus-navel hath sprung.
What need of scriptures many and long?

Verily the Bhagavadgita is a poem of inestimable value to the earnest seeker alike of divine wisdom and ethical enlightenment ; and language is all too poor adequately to depict its exquisite beauty and superb grandeur. Within the small compass of 700 mellifluous verses it comprises wondrous solutions, for well-nigh all known types of thinkers, of the most intricate problems that either puzzle the brain or perplex the conscience of man. It is a

beacon to the storm-tossed vessel in the shoreless ocean of life, a pole-star to the soul Godward bent. One's voice is hushed at the very thought of expounding its profound philosophy. Yet many and various have been its commentators and exponents, and innumerable the hearts and minds they have soothed and illumined by their several interpretations. Not only has it poured healing balm upon spirits weighed down by doubt and despair and hearts agonized by grief and misery, but it has also quenched with nectar the thirst of the transcendentalist, and blessed the devotee with vision beatific. Indeed, so catholic is its religion, so all-encircling its ontology that the theist and the rationalist, the pragmatist and the agnostic have all their cozy nooks in it side by side, and in its singular solidarity they may find a ready bond of union. Nor even need the politician or the sociologist turn away hungry and disappointed from its hospitable Hall.

As sunshine and rain are to trees and plants, so are the teachings of the Gita to the whole self of man. Like unto the still waters of a dreamy mountain-lake embosoming the infinite

sky with its countless stars of immensely different magnitudes and distances equally vast and varying. this marvellous booklet infolds in its altruistic embrace the faith and science, the emotion and intellect, the wisdom and learning of all ages and climes. Its transparent pages mirror all the luminaries, great and small, dim and bright, that have ever bespangled or do still adorn the blue deep of the human mind. And behold, they do not stand independent and isolated here, but are fondly locked in one another's arms like kith and kin. As if by magic all schools of thought, all sects and creeds, in bitter contest elsewhere are, within its charmed circle, most dexterously organised and synthesized into one magnificent University, one cosmopolitan Church,—explaining and reconciling all dogmas and paradoxes, melting and fusing all inconsistencies and contradictions. It is rightly named the song of the Lord; for, all melodies, all notes of the gamut in every pitch and scale blend here in an entrancing harmony. It is the one monumental poem that bears irrefutable testimony to India's ancient glory. It is also India's greatest gift to the world; and what Schopenhauer said of

the Upanishads regarding himself may with equal truth be spoken of the Gita in respect of humanity at large.

It is no wonder therefore that fresh tracts and new volumes are ever pouring in upon its sacred theme, as if to proclaim the fact that its depth is unfathomable, and the last word can never be said about it. Each earnest student discerns something novel in it, novel to him at any rate, and if his heart is kindled with love of his kind he naturally longs to share the joy and benefit of his discovery with his fellow men. Thus has Gita literature swelled year by year, and may now constitute a library by itself. Strange as it may sound, the Biologist of to-day will be staggered in his self-gratulation when he is told that his latest inductions and deductions relating to metabolism and catabolism are all foreshadowed in its genesis of the world,—a genesis, which one might venture to aver, will firmly withstand the meticulous scrutiny of even a reincarnated Bain and Spencer.

The present treatise consists of a brief outline of only a few out of numerous discourses

given from one end of the country to the other by Pandit Bhawani Shanker, the veteran Theosophical lecturer, well known to, and much loved and respected by Indian fellows of the T. S. Those discourses had such a pure and ennobling influence on his audiences, and our venerable brother, Sir Subramani Iyer, was so struck by the world-disgust and God-hunger they stimulated in the attentive listener that he more than once expressed a strong wish that full notes should be taken of them, so that with the necessary touching up they might eventually be brought out in book-form,—he with the gracefulness, all his own, undertaking the financial responsibility for the publication. But the paucity of stenographers in those days at the several T. S. Branches at which the dear Panditji spoke prevented our taking immediate advantage of this generous offer. At long last, however, it became the pleasant duty of the Independent League of the T. S. with the aid of its Calcutta Branch to carry out only a fragment of the learned Dr. Subramani's idea. The demand for a second edition of the pamphlet thus presented to the public is, in the absence of any endeavour whatever to promote its

circulation, the best proof of its intrinsic worth.

But the reader must not look in it for either the hair-splitting arguments of mediæval theologians or the scholarly disquisitions of Telang, Tilak, Aiyangar & Co., nor yet for the comprehensive penetration of Subba Row or the metaphysical acumen of the Dreamer. This thesis will introduce him to a very different and far more enraptured scene,—a scene where the eye, tired and aching with the lurid glow and galvanic vibrations of a splendid but rapidly revolving Cinema, finds relief and rest in the cool and gentle radiance of the moon as she reposes meditatively on the green banks and soft-hued beds of sweet scented flowers in the garden of Paradise. For, the author is no mean denizen of this gross planet, but a rover of empyrean space, a dweller on “the floor of heaven thick inlaid with patines of bright gold”, and is thus able to shed on us the mellowed light which his Bhakti and Vairagya have distilled from those resplendent spheres. His whole career has been an assiduous preparation for this delightful service, which he joyously renders

to all sincere seekers of eternal verities and the life immortal.

A glance at the self-imposed hardship and discipline of that uncommon career will be both interesting and profitable to the reader as shewing the rugged path that the disciple or voluntary servant of God and man has to tread in order that he may evolve the qualities essential for the efficient discharge of the benevolent yet humble duties, and the grave yet fascinating responsibilities of his pious office. Born in August, 1859, of a high Brahman family with the pride of blue-blood running in his veins, at South Canara, which even now is a stronghold of formal orthodoxy, hemmed in and fettered by all the cramping traditions and blinding superstitions of that dark epoch of Indian history, Pandit Bhawani Shanker, at the early age of 20, burst through the shackles of pride and prejudice alike, and joined the T. S. in March, 1880, when that obscure body was as much under a priestly as under a political ban, with the prowess and valour of a young Hercules, battling against a whole regiment of barbarous troops bent upon strangling it in its infancy.

At this critical juncture when darkness impenetrable brooded over its horizon, our dauntless but unassuming Pandit, following solely the lead of the star shining within him, not merely threw in his lot with the friendless and suspiciously eyed, yet withal sanguine and redoubtable founders of this meteoric society, but regardless of all personal consequences tore himself off from the affectionate arms of mother, wife and sister, and all the ties of flesh and blood—so that the very dawn of the year 1881 found him gladly exchanging the pleasant *insouciance*, the safe harbourage of home and hearth for the privations and austerities of an ascetic, and placing himself under the tutelage and training of no less exacting a monitor than that strangely complex and mysterious apostle of Theosophy, H.P.B. herself.

For four good years, with promise of no reward save the privilege of serving, he submitted without the faintest grumble to all the tests and ordeals of a neophyte, and coming out immaculate therefrom, was with fire and water tempered and moulded by her masterly hand into the purity and elasticity of a disciple.

So well did he stand all these severe trials and so completely did he surrender himself to her modelling that in no time he won her motherly love, was allowed glimpses of the Masters, and trusted with communications from Them. Later on, when H.P.B. departed from India he was initiated into some of the hidden laws and secret practices of Ràja-Yoga by the famous mystic, Subba Row.

Thus armed and equipped he was sent out to inspect and instruct, and much more to enliven and enhearten the comparatively few branches of the T. S. that were then scattered over the country. It was in the course of perhaps his second inspection tour that I came across him early in January, 1885, and at once conceived and sealed a friendship that has grown deeper and more intimate with every year, and has never known a shadow, but always yielded the purest joy and is replete with the most delicious reminiscences. So child-like in his simplicity, so unconscious of his spiritual development, so warm in his selfless affection and sympathy, so ardent in his zeal for true Theosophy, so fervid in his devotion to the great Teachers,

to know him was to love him, and to pass a few days in his holy company under the sparkling sunshine of his smiling eyes and lips, in the fragrant aroma of his saintly and celibate life was to be suffused with a subtle intoxication of exalted enthusiasm and transported into the iridescent realm of peace ineffable ! Oh ! the ecstasy of the weeks we first spent with him from mystic twilight to romantic eve, diving lustily into the glorious mysteries of Brahma-vidya, eagerly exploring the domains of philosophy, chanting rapturous hymns to the Masters ! We lived as it were the very life of the verse :

मञ्चिता महत्प्राणा बोधयन्तः परस्परम् ।

कथयन्तश्च मां नित्यम् तुष्यन्ति च रमन्ति च ॥

Our feet scarcely touched the earth ; our souls floated along in an Elysian dream-land !

Thirty long years he has worked in this way, enlightening many minds, gladdening many hearts, and above all, uplifting many souls throughout the length and breadth of this vast peninsula with never a thought of himself with never a complaint of any kind on his lips but ever in contemplation raised from the sacred

presence of the Masters to the adored lotus-feet of the Lord! Bird's-eye views of the range covered and impression left by him have been sketched in the annual Reports of the Society's Convention. He has revelled all his life in the study of the Gita and the Upanishads, not in mere intellectual reflection, but in devouring with his whole self and being, the inmost spirit of those sacred scriptures. And these sermons are but faint echoes of the divine voice ringing inside the core of this devout aspirant, and redolent of the profound serenity and veneration of his noble and illuminated soul. They reverently touch upon that wonderful feature of the Gita which brings home to the readers' mind that, to use the inspired speaker's own words, "it is the concentrated essence of the highest teaching and thought that is capable of appreciation by man", that "it is the book of life and embraces in its majestic sweep all phases of life", that it is, I may add, the song of songs—a hallelujah of symphony and seraphic choir!

Chowkhamba,
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UPENDRA NATH BASU.